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# **Too Drunk to Consent? Exploring the Contestations and Disruptions in Male Focused Sexual Violence Prevention Interventions**

**Dr Anna Carline,<sup>1</sup> Dr Clare Gunby and Mr Stuart Taylor**

## **Abstract**

Primary prevention interventions, often in the form of media campaigns, are frequently utilised in order to tackle sexual violence. However, many in the UK have been criticised for perpetuating victim-blaming, due to their focus on the behaviour of women. One notable exception is a Liverpool City Council Campaign, which targeted young men (aged 18-24) in a bid to reduce rates of alcohol-related rape. Drawing upon an assessment involving 41 male university students, this article generates original insights into the development and utilisation of male focused rape prevention interventions. As this analysis shows, the young men's responses to the campaign involved negotiating discourses of sex, consent, rape, sexuality and gender - especially masculinity. While participants frequently drew upon stereotypes and misconceptions, moments of contestation and disruption emerged. We argue that interventions should concentrate upon masculinity and moments of disruption and contestation (possibly through the use of peer group discussions), in order to encourage critical reflections on gender and sexual violence, and to potentially engender more ethical practices.

**Key Words:** Primary Interventions, Perpetration Prevention, Masculinity, Sexual Violence, Alcohol

## **Introduction**

Preventing sexual violence against women remains a critical issue for policy makers across the globe (WHO et al., 2014). Recent statistics in England and Wales indicate that 19% of women have suffered a sexual assault since the age of 16 (ONS, 2016: 6). Indeed, 16-24 year-olds are particularly vulnerable to experiencing sexual offences (Felts et al., 2012), with female Higher Education (HE) students in England and Wales suffering significant levels of sexual harassment and assault (Universities UK (UUK), 2016). There is a well-established link between intoxication and sexual offences, with data indicating that in at least 50% of

rapes reported to the police alcohol had been consumed by either the victim and/or perpetrator (Abbey et al., 2004). However, the inability of the criminal justice system to effectively deter and respond to sexual violence – particularly in cases involving alcohol - is well documented (Hohl and Stanko, 2015). Accordingly, there is an ongoing need and governmental commitment to develop additional methods for reducing sexual violence (HM Government, 2016), with the use of primary prevention campaigns being one such approach (Stern, 2010).

Primary prevention interventions can be distinguished from, but are often used alongside, secondary and tertiary interventions, both of which intercede post assault (WHO and London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010). While internationally there has been a proliferation of sexual violence primary interventions which target their messages at men (DeGue et al., 2014), in the UK these remain in the minority, compared to the ubiquity of campaigns focused on women (Stern, 2010). One notable exception is a Liverpool City Council Campaign, which specifically targeted young men (aged 18-24) in a bid to reduce incidents of alcohol-related rape.

In order to generate original insights into the development and utilisation of male focused interventions, this article provides a critical analysis of the Liverpool campaign, by scrutinising the opinions of 41 young male HE students, collated through six focus groups. To the authors' knowledge, no other U.K. research has critically analysed young male, HE students' perspectives regarding a bespoke and specifically targeted intervention, which is undoubtedly due to the sheer novelty of the campaign approach. The article explores how participants' reactions and responses to the campaign involved negotiating discourses of sex, consent, rape, sexuality and gender - especially masculinity. Male participants frequently

drew on dominant gender discourses and stereotypes, and at times voiced opinions which could be considered ‘problematic’. At the same time, their views were often nuanced and paradoxical. Tensions frequently emerged and stereotypical perspectives did not remain unchallenged, with participants often contradicting themselves. In concluding, we make two key recommendations: a) future interventions should concentrate upon masculinity and moments of contestation and disruption and b) peer group discussions should be an integral part of an intervention, as opposed to a mechanism that simply assesses campaign impact.

### **From Victimisation Prevention to Perpetration Prevention: Threat Campaigns and Public Health Interventions**

Utilising primary prevention interventions in order to reduce offending behaviour is not uncommon in the UK (Home Office, 2016). However, sexual violence campaigns have been criticised for ‘providing safety and awareness messages to women’ which places ‘the responsibility for being raped’ solely onto females (Stern, 2010: 52). With such interventions, the actions, motives and intentions of the perpetrator are constructed as irrelevant, and rape is placed outside of politics and socially constructed gender relations (Pease, 2014). The reality of abuse is also misrepresented and following the safety advice does not render women impervious to victimisation (Powell and Henry, 2014). While not widespread in the UK, male focused campaigns do exist, including a Home Office intervention which aimed to raise awareness amongst young men (aged 18-24) that sex without consent is a serious sexual offence (Temkin and Krahe, 2008), as well as the Rape Crisis Scotland campaign, ‘This is not an invitation to rape me’ (Progressive, 2009). Nonetheless, public bodies persist in the use of victimisation interventions. A recent example includes a poster by Sussex Police which informed women that ‘[m]any sexual assaults

could be prevented' and advised them to '[s]tick together and don't let your friend leave with a stranger or go off on their own' (Sanghani, 2015. See further Brooks, 2011; Campbell, 2005; Gunby et al., 2016).

Whether victim or perpetrator focused, interventions may take the form of threat campaigns. These aim to produce behavioural change by engendering fear via emphasising the detrimental consequences that may flow from engaging in the activity – such as negative health and/or legal repercussions (Cauberghe et al., 2009; Lee and Krogh, 2005). They are frequently used in relation to substance abuse (Wolburg, 2006), dangerous and/or drink driving (Rossiter and Thornton, 2004), unsafe sex and the contraction of sexually transmitted infections (Terblanche-Smit and Terblanche, 2011). They can, however, be critiqued as being overly individualistic and obscuring the wider social structures which are causative of 'problematic' behaviour. It has also been argued that it is never ethical to purposely cause people to feel fear or anxiety (Hastings et al., 2004). Furthermore, they can be perceived as accusatory and may produce a 'boomerang effect': eliciting the very behaviour they were designed to inhibit (Brehm, 1966). Carmody (2000) also argues that the prevalence of sexual violence *per se* demonstrates that the threat of criminal sanctions is an inadequate prevention mechanism.

In contrast, 'public health' interventions are premised upon a social-ecological understanding of behaviour and offending, which comprises four levels: individual personal history (microsystem), family and peer influences (exosystem), community level influences (mesosystem) and societal/structural level influence (macrosystem) (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979). Hence, an emphasis is placed on the broader cultural, social and structural factors. While not prevalent in the UK, perpetrator focused public health interventions are widely

used in other jurisdictions, particularly the US.<sup>2</sup> Two prominent examples are social norms and bystander interventions. The former aims to promote ethical sexual practice by emphasising that the majority of peers support and engage in consensual and respectful sexual conduct (Casey and Lindhorst, 2009). The latter encourage third party interventions before, during or after an assault (Casey and Lindhorst, 2009), an approach recently developed in the UK by the University of the West of England (UWE, n.d.). The public health model is not, however, beyond criticism. The biomedical concept of public health assumes a ‘discrete identifiable static ‘removable cause’’ (Fletcher, 2014: 127), which fails to encapsulate the reality of gendered violence, particularly the role of gender processes: i.e. the way in which gender is socially and culturally structured and embodied (Fletcher, 2014: 132). Furthermore, while the multifarious causes of violence are emphasised, interventions which deal with the meso and macro system factors, such as addressing gender inequality, are less well developed (Powell and Henry, 2014: 10).

### **Sexual Violence, Higher Education and Masculinities**

The catalyst for the development of the Liverpool campaign arose from the findings of an earlier online survey examining experiences of alcohol-related sexual violence amongst students in the North West of England (Gunby et al., 2012). While the survey data has been analysed in detail elsewhere (Gunby et al., 2012), it is pertinent to note that 30.7% of 1079 participants had experienced alcohol related non-consensual intercourse, with 60% classifying themselves as ‘very drunk’ at the time of the incident. The most frequently used tactic to procure sex was to be used sexually after the participant had been drinking alcohol and was conscious, but too intoxicated to give consent or stop the sexual activity. Despite falling within the legal definition of rape, only 21.1% of those victimised classified their

experience as such. In line with other studies, the victim/perpetrator dyad was overwhelming female/male.

These findings sit within a field of research which has highlighted UK female students' experiences of sexual harassment and violence on campus (Phipps and Smith, 2012; NUS, 2010; UUK, 2016), leading to the creation of a UUK (Universities United Kingdom) taskforce to tackle its prevalence (UUK, 2016). Survey research indicates that 68% of female students have been verbally or physical harassed on campus, 14% have suffered a serious physical or sexual assault and 54% have experienced sexual harassment on a night out (NUS, 2010; UUK, 2016). Of new students, or 'freshers', 17% experience sexual harassment during their first week of term and 29% report witnessing the sexual harassment of another (UUK, 2016: 19). Research has also shown the existence of a 'lad culture' on campus, which has been defined as 'a group or 'pack' mentality residing in activities such as sport, heavy alcohol consumption and 'banter' which is sexist, misogynistic, or homophobic' (Phipps and Young, 2013: 28). This definition is not unproblematic, nor is it possible to assert a causal link between lad culture and sexual violence (Phipps, 2016; UUK, 2016). Nevertheless, 'lad culture' tends to normalise sexist attitudes and sexual misconduct, which ultimately impacts negatively upon female students' experiences of University life (Phipps and Young, 2015; UUK, 2016).

While space does not permit a detailed analysis, 'lad culture' can be understood as a culturally specific form of masculinity which endeavours to (re)assert the dominance of men (Phipps, 2016; Phipps and Young, 2013). Masculinities are, of course, socially constructed, relational, diverse, fluid and, significantly, hierarchical (Connell, 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity refers to the most powerful (although not

necessarily the most common) and idealised version of masculinity, and is said to encompass a 'set of values established by men in power that functions to include and exclude, and to organize society in gender unequal ways' (Jewkes and Morrell, 2012: 40). While culturally specific, and thus imbued with race, ethnicity and class (hence it is more appropriate to refer to hegemonic masculinities) (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005), these values include heterosexuality, 'strength, stoicism and aggressiveness' (Doull et al., 2013: 330). Hence, femininity and non-idealised versions of masculinity are subordinated, and not all men are able to embody the ideals of hegemonic masculinity. As such, 'lad culture' can be constructed as one way in which some young men aspire to hegemonic masculinity. At the same time, as men are able to occupy multiple positions of masculinity simultaneously (Jewkes et al., 2015: 113), socially powerful young men can, and do, engage in aspects of lad culture (Phipps, 2016), bolstering its proliferation on campus and further supporting its construction as a way of achieving dominance.

It is, however, important to note that the relationship between hegemonic masculinities and gender violence is complex (Hearn, 2012; Phipps, 2016). Further, 'not all harmful masculinities are hegemonic' (Jewkes et al., 2015: 114), and it should not be assumed that hegemonic masculinities comprise only negative values (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Recent research and interventions have endeavoured to promote the performance of 'positive masculinity' amongst young men, which focuses upon the healthy and inclusive aspects of masculine gender identity (see for example Englar-Carlson and Kiselica, 2013).<sup>3</sup> Relatedly, research has noted the emergence of 'equality masculinities', which 'legitimate an egalitarian relationship' (Messerschmidt, 2012: 73) between men and women. Ideally, interventions should aim to produce gender equity (Jewkes et al., 2015). However, fundamentally transforming hegemonic masculinities is exceptionally challenging (Duncanson, 2015;



Jewkes et al., 2015). Dominant discourses which afford certain groups of men power are difficult to disrupt and, as the analysis below will show, problematic stereotypes relating to masculinity, femininity and sexuality endure, even when challenged.

### **Can't Answer? Can't Consent - Producing and Assessing a Male Focused Campaign**

The survey findings of North West based students' experiences of alcohol related sexual violence (Gunby et al., 2012) were presented to the then Liverpool CitySafe Crime Reduction Partnership. Soon after, the council developed a prevention campaign which specifically targeted male students and nighttime economy users aged 18-24: the demographic most likely to perpetrate sexual offences (Abbey et al., 2004; UUK, 2016).<sup>4</sup> The campaign aimed to: clarify that engaging in sexual activity with someone unable to consent - either through voluntary or involuntary intoxication - is rape, reduce and prevent the offences of rape and sexual assault and raise awareness of the impact of non-consensual sex against young women and girls (Nowack, 2012: 2). The intervention comprised campaign posters, placed in male toilets, and beer mats placed in the city's universities' Student Unions and in various youth-focused city centre bars and clubs. The campaign poster contained the strap-line: 'Can't answer? Can't consent – sex without consent is rape', while the tagline on the beer mats stated: 'sex without consent is a crime'. A link to information detailing the legal position on rape (and contact information for support services) was included on the materials. While the local nature of the campaign (and subsequent assessment of its impact) may be seen as a limitation, research demonstrates that interventions need to be tailored to reflect and respond to 'localized world views' (Casey and Lindhorst, 2009: 100). Hence, it is important that both the campaign and assessment were geographically and demographically specific.

(Insert figure 1 here).

The impact of the Liverpool campaign was assessed via two means: six focusing groups with 41 male students and an on-street survey of 321 student and non-student male participants. All participants were aged 18-24. The authors led on the focus groups while the City Council designed, organised and analysed the on-street interviews (Nowack, 2012). In what follows, we discuss the focus group data, as the discursive approach enabled the development of more nuanced insights. Due to the campaign targeting men, it made intuitive sense to use male only focus groups, and utilise a male facilitator, to identify the impacts of the campaign. Whilst some research suggests that men may feel more at ease discussing personal issues with a female facilitator (Yager et al., 2013), it is also accepted that men and women interact differently in group situations (and talk differently about sex) depending on the group's gender composition (Beres, 2007; Hollander, 2004; Lawrence et al., 2009). It is also acknowledged that relatively homogeneous groups are more likely to lead to disclosure, particularly on topics of a sensitive nature, as participants feel more comfortable (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015). Hence, it was rationalised that the presence of women – whether as participants or as facilitator - may hinder the flow of discussion, thus justifying the use of single-sex focus groups in the current research.

However, it is recognised that there are disadvantages of using exclusively male groups for research. Given the hegemonic nature of masculinity, it can be argued that males in focus group contexts 'are more concerned with status and competition' (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015: 27), more likely to conform to stereotypical gendered expectations and to avoid narratives which appear to undermine their masculinity (Hollander, 2004). As such, it has

been argued that men will strive to produce a normative ‘masculine self’, which eclipses their own perspectives. However, this presupposes the existence of an essentialised self which is hidden behind the public display, as opposed to recognising that gender identity, including sexuality, is performatively constituted (Allen, 2005). Hence, rather than being deemed counterproductive, the production of masculinity within the focus group setting ‘offers a valuable first hand glimpse of male sexuality in action’ - the same sexuality that is performed in the real world (Allen, 2005: 35).

In order to engage a diverse range of male participants, focus group recruitment comprised a two-prong process, with involvement being incentivised with the offer of a £20 gift voucher. First, male participants who completed the on-street survey were asked to take part in a focus group, and those who answered affirmatively were later re-contacted. Despite three email attempts, none of these men ultimately volunteered. Second, a non-probability sample of students studying across two faculties within Liverpool’s two main universities was invited to take part. These students were contacted via faculty-level email distribution lists. Consequently, the focus groups comprised entirely HE students recruited via this means. Findings cannot therefore be read as representing the views of a significant part of the target audience – those of non-students. Furthermore, the majority – although not all of the students who volunteered - were white (however, as highlighted below, this was proportionate to the ethnicity make-up of the two HE institutions). The lack of diversity is acknowledged to be a significant limitation. It is not possible to ignore the relevance of ethnicity, race, class and education with regards to masculinity and male identity, especially when considering the ways these factors will influence young men’s discussions about sex (Lawrence et al., 2009; Nagel et al., 2005). Non-students and/or black and minority ethnic men may endorse

different perspectives and their inclusion may have altered the content and dynamics of the group discussions.

Given these limitations, it is not possible to generalise from the findings of the study, and we do not claim to do so. At the same time, as the analysis below illustrates, the findings do resonate with the wider student and non-student literature in this area, thus suggesting that the research has a broader – although not universal – significance. It is also important to highlight that students are not a homogenous group, with the two participating universities having unique and intersecting populations. For example, in 2014/2015, 95.4% of undergraduate students in institution A were from the UK, with 1% from the EU and 3.6% from non-EU countries; 76% were school leavers, with 96.6% of those previously attending a state school. Overall, 44% of institution A's student population was drawn from Liverpool and surrounding regions, with 10.3% being from a BME background (OFFA, 2017; What Uni, 2017). In contrast, institution B had a high number of non-UK students, comprising 25.3% non-EU and 1.8% other-EU, and a higher percentage of BME students: 14.3%. In addition, 85% were school leavers and 12.3% had attended a private school (OFFA, 2017; What Uni, 2017). Thus, the views of these students may well be reflective of wider, non-student based perspectives.

During the focus groups participants were asked about their knowledge of the campaign and their reflections on the campaign image. Following discussions based upon unprompted recall, participants were shown the campaign images to facilitate further debate. Participants were also asked about their personal understandings of rape and consent and how the campaign could be improved. The qualitative data were fully transcribed and scrutinised,

using thematic analysis: a systematic approach to the categorisation and consolidation of study findings (Howarth, 2002), in conjunction with the data analysis software NVivo.

It is acknowledged that the assessment does not amount to an evaluation. This would have required substantial pre and post testing and involved measuring *behavioural*, and not just attitudinal, change. The difficulties of developing and implementing such an evaluation strategy are well documented (Powell and Henry, 2014: 11), despite recognition of the practical, financial and time factors which impede evaluative work (DeGue et al., 2014). Nevertheless, the research provides original insights into a sub-set of the target audiences' responses to, and reflections on the intervention, which will aid the development of future campaigns. To this end, we examine participants' perspectives around the campaign under the following three themes: 'constructing consent', 'constructing rape and rapists' and 'constructing the campaign'.

### **Constructing Consent: Understanding the Campaign Message**

#### *'She Couldn't Consent to a Cup of Tea...': Intoxication and Consent*

Participants generally demonstrated a sound appreciation of the campaign's key message, with it being noted that the image effectively conveyed that the individual was too intoxicated to consent: 'she couldn't consent to a cup of tea, never mind sex' (FG3). It was further recognised that the campaign aimed to raise awareness that 'people are taking advantage of incredibly drunk people' (FG1) and that this amounted to rape. Numerous participants also noted that the absence of a verbal refusal should not be taken to indicate consent: 'it's trying to highlight the point that just because they can't say no [it] doesn't

mean it's not rape' (FG4). Indeed, one respondent emphasised the importance of challenging those who might believe 'if she hasn't answered, [she] still might be consenting' (FG2), particularly within the context of intoxication. This finding is interesting, as young men and women often *report* that they would expect a lack of consent to be verbalised, while also indicating the frequent use, and understanding of, implicit rejections and non-verbal refusals (Beres, 2010; Jozkowski et al., 2014; O'Byrne et al., 2008). The expectation of a verbal refusal could be an unanticipated consequence of the prevalence of the 'no means no' missive (Burkett and Hamilton, 2012). Undoubtedly, there remains a need to challenge the perspective that women's refusals are insincere, particularly given the reported use of problematic refrains such as 'no means yes, and yes means anal' on US University campuses (Fleishmann, 2010). However, within the neoliberal context the 'no means no' message has had the unfortunate consequence of reinforcing heteronormative sexual scripts which construct women as sexual gatekeepers (Burkett and Hamilton, 2012; Gavey, 2005).

Nevertheless, a potential for misunderstanding was identified, due to the use of the phrase 'can't answer', with it being contemplated that this could be interpreted to suggest that 'as soon as they answer ... they've given consent' (FG5). This, however, is not the case - as one participant noted: 'like even if she's, you know, pissed out of her head but still saying yeah, you'd think about it and just go, oh, it's not worth it' (FG6). These young men, thus, appeared to appreciate that an intoxicated individual may respond, even affirmatively, but may still be incapable of consenting. Hence, there was some appreciation of the complex nature of intoxication and how it impacts upon a person's cognitive ability and behaviour. Accordingly, a significant proportion of men demonstrated a remarkable 'literacy' (Beres, 2010: 5) with respects to consent and intoxication, thus contesting and disrupting other problematic views. As the research did not involve pre and post campaign testing, it is not

possible to ascertain whether these more enlightened opinions were linked in some way to viewing the poster; although in the least it does appear that the image supported discerning perspectives. At the same time, it is recognised that the use of the phrase ‘can’t answer’ potentially perpetuates the (problematic) discourse that (non)consent will be, or should be, verbalised. This is perhaps an unwitting negative consequence of the attempt to represent, in an uncomplicated and noticeable manner, when an intoxicated individual is incapable of consenting.

### *Resignifying Rape as Consensual Sex? Blurred Lines and Guilty Consciences*

The above findings suggest that the image was effective in communicating the impact of extreme intoxication and highlights the existence of enlightened perspectives. At the same time problematic views transpired, with it being suggested that in the situation depicted ‘the lines are like blurred’ (FG2). For a minority, this was linked to the complexities of intoxication - specifically that losing the capacity to consent is dependent upon ‘how drunk you are’ (FG3). Nevertheless, a significant proportion of participants sought to destabilise the boundary between consensual sex and rape, which was considered to be ‘a bit of a grey area’ (FG4):

Not at all to excuse someone that has had sex with someone without their consent – but it’s not always, I should imagine, the case where it can be so black and white that it’s rape, not rape, you know, um, which these adverts make it ... sort of are making it as though it is sort of black and white ... it’s a lot greyer (FG5).

It was further argued: ‘people could think that, well I didn’t have consent but it wasn’t rape, you know’ (FG5), which completely undermines the campaign message. Numerous participants endeavoured to interpret the scenario as depicting a potentially consensual encounter. It was contemplated that the image could represent a situation in which ‘they’re getting quite close and then she does fall asleep’ and then ‘it’s just kind of a guilty

conscience, do you, don't you?' (FG1). Similarly, in FG2 it was considered to be 'a fine line', but that 'you've got to make the call in the end', as to whether or not you engage in sexual intercourse.

Constructing the situation as a 'fine line' or a matter of 'guilty conscience' suggests that, while considered to be inappropriate and unethical, having sexual intercourse in such circumstances would not constitute a serious sexual offence; a finding which resonates with other research (see Gunby et al., 2013). It was also suggested that some men might pursue an encounter in the hope of a successful outcome: 'like he could start kissing her, she could wake up and freak out, or she could wake up and be like happy days' (FG3). This fails to recognise that kissing someone when they are asleep amounts to a sexual assault (Sexual Offences Act 2003, section 3) and illustrates the pervasive influence of dominant heteronormative scripts of masculinity which situate men as tenacious 'initiators' (Murphy, 2009: 121). It was also suggested that consent may be inferred from the surrounding context: 'what if she said something to him earlier in the night, like, oh, come back to mine ... I'll wait for you' (FG2) and that the relationships would be of significance: 'it could even be his girlfriend and they've been going out for two years ... always have sex, so I just had sex with her again last night' (FG2). Such views fail to recognise that consent can be withdrawn at any time, should not be inferred from earlier actions and must be given anew to every sexual encounter.

### *Women as Sexual Gatekeepers and Cock Teasers: Perspectives on Consent*

The majority of participants expressed that they were aware that 'sex without consent was rape'. Nevertheless, it became apparent that there was considerable uncertainty regarding the



meaning of consent. Indeed, the intervention's omission to 'tell you what constitutes consent' (FG5) was considered a weakness, implicating that future interventions should concentrate on clarify the legal meaning of consent, particularly in cases involving alcohol (Beres, 2010). This should not be read as overestimating the ability of the law to deter sexual offending, nor as promoting an overly individualistic approach to prevention which disregards the wider social and cultural factors. The causes of sexual offending are multifaceted, as highlighted by the public health model. Nevertheless, law and policies 'are only as effective as peoples' understanding and use of them' (Borges et al., 2008: 85) and an understanding of the law is one of the prerequisites of deterrence (Robinson and Darley, 2004).<sup>5</sup> Research has also identified that a 'lack of understanding of consent' is one of the pathways to sexual violence (Warren et al., 2015: 907) and consciousness raising is a recognised (although not sufficient) element of engendering behavioural change (Quadara and Wall, 2012: 5). Thus, interventions could explore meanings of consent during group discussions. This approach is supported by research which indicates that male homosociality plays a key role in the construction of masculinity, male sexuality and sexual violence against women. As Flood notes: 'male-peer relations have a profound influence on some men's heterosexual involvements' (Flood, 2008: 339). Accordingly, peer group discussions have the potential to invoke shifts beyond the individual and effect wider local community and cultural change.

Participants offered various conceptualisations of consent. At the more positive end of the spectrum, and reflective of affirmative consent models, one participant suggested that consent was 'basically an agreement between both [the] male and female to perform sexual intercourse' (FG4). However, the majority of young men drew on more implicit models and conceptualised consent in terms of 'tacit understanding' (Beres, 2010: 5): 'you get a vibe'

(FG1) and ‘just feel it in the air’ (FG2). Others drew upon notions of ‘active participation’ (Beres, 2010: 8): ‘you can tell if someone’s getting on with you’ (FG2) and as something that ‘sort of just happens’ (FG3). However, participants in all focus groups frequently endorsed the discourse of women as sexual gatekeepers (Gavey, 2005). Consent was conceptualised as someone ‘agreeing to it’ (FG2) or as having ‘permission’ (FG4), suggesting that the sexual activity will be initiated predominately by one of the parties (read: male). As one participant stated: ‘it’s more like she allows you ... to have sex’ (FG4). Even when constructed as a ‘mutual encounter’, the script of gatekeeper could still be seen.

Here, we see how dominant discourses, which construct idealised performances of sexuality, femininity and hegemonic masculinity, continue to endure. Indeed, the young men’s views indicate the continued influence of an active/passive male/female binary, and a correlating presumptive – and negative – conception of consent. Consent is presumed to be present, unless a woman demonstrates otherwise, which fortifies a woman’s role as gatekeeper: ‘if someone keeps pushing you off .... Then obviously [consent is] not implied’ (FG2). This places an expectation upon women to turn down sexual advances and conflicts with the legal reality that consent is a subjective statement of mind which, strictly speaking, does not need to be displayed (*R v Hysa*, 2007). Furthermore, as young women sometimes feel the pressure to submit to unwanted sex due to fears of disappointing men and fears of being raped (Burkett and Hamilton, 2012), there is a need for interventions to foster mutual encounters. It is recognised that the campaign could have been improved in this respect.

Disconcertingly, the ‘women as gatekeepers’ discourse developed into more problematic views when a minority of men spoke frankly about how they might persuade a woman to engage in sex. It was noted that ‘there’s ways of sort of, um, bringing someone round to

wanting to have sex' (FG3). While it was recognised by some that 'persuasion could become coercion' (FG3), others justified their techniques:

Like I've bought girls back before and they're like not too sure, and you're like, oh, like persuade them, and then eventually they give ... if they agree in the end, then I think it's alright (FG4).

Such perspectives construct sex as something that young men endeavour to get from young women (Gavey, 2005), justifying the use of pressure and structuring a woman's refusal as an 'opportunity to continue' (Muehlenhard et al., 2016: 471; Jozkowski and Peterson, 2013).

As one participant noted: 'yeah, it's pressure ... but as long as you say yeah, that's fair enough' (FG4). Such views fail to acknowledge that 'non-physical forms of pressure and coercion' amount to a 'violation of sexual autonomy' (Burkett and Hamilton, 2012: 820).

Subsequently, some participants espoused worrying views of female sexuality:

But then there's like gentle persuasion and then there's like other things, whereas it's like they'd be like, oh...they could be saying no, like no means no but like sometimes they're just trying to be a cock tease, basically (FG2).

It can be argued that these minority views do not reflect hegemonic masculinity, but instead display traits of 'hostile' and 'hyper' masculinity which may have been deployed as a means of asserting and trying to achieve dominance. Significantly, both forms of masculinity have been identified as key predictors of sexual aggression (Burk et al., 2004; Malamuth et al., 1991; Mosher and Sirkin, 1984). While hostile masculinity combines 'a desire to be in control and dominant especially in relation to women' as well as 'an insecure, defensive and distrustful orientation' towards females (Quadara, 2014: 59), hyper masculinity concerns men who 'exhibit an exaggeration of the traditional male gender roles' (Burk et al., 2004: 5). Of particular note is the absence of an 'empathic concern for the female's subjective experience' (Mosher and Sirkin, 1984: 151-152), which is arguably present in the endorsement of 'persuasive' tactics. Critics may argue that the young men's displays of hyper-masculinity are simply acts of bravado, as opposed to representing a personal

perspective, and hence the data should be treated with caution. However, as noted above, this fails to recognise the socially constructed nature of gender identity and sexuality (Allen, 2005).

## **Constructing Rape and Rapists: Endorsing and Disrupting Myths and Misconceptions**

### *Endorsing and Challenging the 'Stranger Rape' as 'Real Rape' Myth*

Throughout their discussions, participants in all focus groups frequently drew on the 'stranger rape' as 'real rape' stereotype (Lonsway and Fitzgerald, 1994) and a significant proportion of participants demonstrated very little understanding of the reality of rape. Some, for example, opined that the majority of rapes were committed by strangers: 'obviously the most common kind is probably kind of when you're a bit drunk, down kind of dark alleys' (FG1). Discourses relating to stranger rape could be seen to influence their interpretation of the image: 'he could be an intruder that's just come in while she's asleep on the couch' (FG2). It was also considered that 'a man in an alley with possibly a knife' was 'more of a crime', than the scenario depicted in the campaign (FG5). Relatedly, it was suggested that the relationship between the two parties could change what was occurring in the scenario: 'that could be like the missus though, couldn't it? ...then it would be a bit different ... most of the time you get consent anyway, it's not really [rape]...' (FG4).

These opinions did not remain unchallenged, with participants' contemplating that they – and others – were often unduly influenced by misconceptions:

Everyone has an image in their head like some man in an alley like dragging a girl and like raping them ... Whereas stuff like that is just...it's taking advantage but it's still rape, like it's still essentially the same (FG5).

Subsequently, a minority of young men reflected that while the situation depicted was ‘quite a common situation’ (FG6), it frequently did ‘not get reported’ (FG3) to the police. Hence, the image was considered to be ‘striking’, and the campaign sent out a ‘good message’ and was a ‘success’, as it challenged misconceptions and was effective in raising ‘awareness of the reality of rape’ (FG3).

### *Menacing Rapists and Unwitting Men*

The pervasive influence of the ‘stranger rape’ myth could also be seen when participants discussed the campaign’s potential reach and impact. In FG3, for example, it was speculated that the image was not ‘aimed at hard core rapists ... who are like going out every night and raping people’, upon whom it was thought the campaign would have little effect.

Subsequently, the majority of young men in all focus groups engaged in processes of othering by promoting an essentialist construction of rapists, whom were considered to be ‘menacing’ by nature (FG3) and readily identifiable: ‘you look at someone, and you say ‘they’ve got a rapist face’ (FG3). It is perhaps not surprising that the young men engaged in this othering and demonisation of rapists. The construction of sex offenders as ‘monstrous predatory others’ (Ducat et al., 2009; Quadara, 2014) is frequently reinforced by the media (O’Hara, 2012) and arguably the criminal justice system, via for example, the Sexual Offenders Register (Ducat et al., 2009). In the context of developing interventions, such othering tactics can be situated as ‘identity work’ (Allen, 2005), through which young men endeavour to distance themselves from the ‘bad’ masculinity of the rapist, in order to construct, perform and protect their ‘‘good’ ‘non-rapist’ ‘masculine self’ (Masters, 2010: 38).

Nonetheless, tensions arose as a few participants acknowledged that the ‘stranger/menacing rapist’ stereotype was appropriately challenged by the campaign image. Indeed, it was noted that the image potentially pertained to the young men themselves: ‘wherever you're from, whatever your background is, you can find yourself in that situation’ (FG2), thus recognising the ‘everdayness’ of rape (Quadara, 2014). This is not to suggest that the vast majority of young men commit sexual offences, but rather that sexually abusive behaviour is frequently normalised (Quadara, 2014. See also Gunby et al., 2013), with some studies indicating that up to 43% of men have admitted to engaging in ‘some form of sexual coercion or aggression’ (Quadara, 2014: 44. See also Jozkowski and Peterson, 2013).

Consequently, young men’s othering of rapists frequently conflicted with their awareness of the reality of rape, which can be seen to disrupt the good non-rapist/bad rapist masculinity dichotomy. However, the young men strove to manage this tension by constructing two further categories of potential perpetrators, whom were contrasted to that of the ‘menacing rapist’. Firstly, ‘those who take advantage and [do] not really think it’s rape’ (FG5) and secondly, the unwitting (and drunken) man: ‘who’s not aware that they may become rapists if they continue to crack on’ (FG3). In drawing this distinction, the young men indicated that the perpetrator’s drunken state (or lack thereof) was relevant to their assessments of culpability: ‘it speaks more about him as a person if he’s gonna rape someone while sober’ (FG2). In contrast, it was argued that the presence of alcohol was considered to potentially lead to ‘miscommunication’: ‘I know I was drunk, I didn’t realise’ (FG2) and that it may often be the case that young men fail to appreciate what their actions entail: ‘you don’t know whether you’ve actually committed rape or not sometimes’ (FG1). These perspectives accord with findings which indicate that young adults are reluctant to apportion blame when a perpetrator was inebriated (Gunby et al., 2013. See also Gunby et al., 2012). Nonetheless,

they do not accord with the law, as intoxication is irrelevant when assessing the reasonableness of a defendant's belief in consent (*R v Grewal*, 2010).

In contrast to the 'menacing rapist', participants suggested that the above two groups of men would be more amenable to the campaign's message, as it may make them 'think twice' (FG4) and prompt them to 'be careful' (FG2). Accordingly, the intervention was perceived to remind viewers to not 'take advantage of this girl' (FG4) and caused participants to contemplate how a woman may feel in the morning: '[it] makes you conscious that she might ... when she wakes up in the morning, be like, fuck it, where am I, what the hell, or this is rape, or something like that' (FG4). Numerous participants spoke about the potential impact of the poster in the first person, suggesting a personal resonance:

Without seeing anything like this, I wouldn't really think about it, it would just be nothing in my head. But then you could sit there and think actually, is she too drunk, then you might be a bit like ... even if she isn't, you might just think oh well, she's saying she isn't but she might be (FG6).

Nevertheless, some participants continued to distance themselves from the campaign message: 'I wouldn't think [it had] anything to do with me' (FG4), even while acknowledging that the campaign may influence other men:

I'm not obviously going to have done it but...maybe people when they are about to commit rape ... they don't actually realise what it is they're doing. So to make it stand out like that, to make you realise it's wrong, it's dangerous, think about it (FG1).

Such distancing discourses resonate with concerns that perpetrator focused campaigns may be considered irrelevant by many and at worse may lead to alienation (Stanley et al., 2012; Rich et al., 2010). These issues point to the complexities and challenges in developing interventions, a point explored further in the following section. At the same time, the findings also suggest that the image was effective at informing young men about the reality

of rape, and while the influence of the ‘stranger rape/real rape’ schema could be seen, moments of contestation emerged.

## **Constructing the Campaign: Challenging Masculinity and Responsibilising Women**

### *Demonising Men: The Challenges and Tensions of Male Focused Campaigns*

While the male focus of the campaign is, we argue, an important improvement upon victim-centric models, it is recognised that the intervention was more aligned with threat campaigns and the accusatory tone could be perceived to be problematic. Indeed, a significant minority of participants critiqued the poster for being ‘accusing’ (FG3), ‘a bit harsh’ (FG5) and for making them feel ‘very uncomfortable’ as they would ‘never think of doing anything like that’ (FG5). It was also considered ‘patronising’ (FG3), which could impact upon its effectiveness: ‘if I’m being told something I already know, I’ll just ignore it’ (FG3).

However, not all participants held such negative opinions. It was also suggested that the poster should explicitly spell out the potential punishment for rape, with one participant admitting ignorance by not knowing ‘whether I’d go to jail or whether it would just be a fine’ (FG5). It was further suggested that a more punitive image would have a deterrent effect:

If this had maybe an image of him sitting in a cell with his head down or something, that would make you think more like because it appeals to your selfish side then to think, Jesus, I don’t want to end...I don’t want to deal with the consequences (FG3).

Nonetheless, even amongst those who lamented the accusatory tone, moments of reflection and disruption emerged. For example, one participant remarked: ‘people don’t tend to think of themselves as bad people ... or as a rapist’ (FG3), and stressed that the campaign needed to ‘make him look less of a villain’ as ‘then it’s easier to say I could be in that position’.

Herein, we can see how the young man negotiated the schema of the stereotypical rapist, and



the alienating potential of the campaign, but in a manner which ultimately acknowledged the ‘everydayness of rape’ (Quadara, 2014).

The finding that some participants felt alienated resonates with research which highlights the negative impacts of threat campaigns (Piccigallo, et al., 2012; Stanley et al., 2010) and also with criticisms that many sexual violence campaigns tend to universalise ‘men as violent and women as passive recipients’ (Carmody, 2003: 201). Subsequently, it has been argued that interventions should construct and promote positive conceptualisations of masculinity (Carmody, 2003). At the same time, such ‘positive’ campaigns do not necessarily avoid perpetuating stereotypes pertaining to male and female sexuality (Murphy, 2009) and even those which aim to engender ethical sexual relationships may still be subject to opprobrium. For example, one male student at the University of Warwick, upon refusing to attend a consent workshop, produced a sign declaring: ‘this is not what a rapist looks like’ (Ali, 2015).

However, it is important to remain cognisant of the underlying social problem and reflect upon how it is represented in the intervention. While space does not enable a detailed analysis, the Liverpool campaign is informed by Bacchi’s (1999) consideration of ‘what is the problem represented to be?’ which, as O’Brien succinctly states, ‘demands greater reflection of the assumptions that underpin the representation of a problem; who is to blame, who benefits and who is harmed’ (2016: 207). Accordingly, it was important that the intervention aimed to portray the tactic of using someone sexually when they were too intoxicated to consent, along with emphasising the gendered nature of the offence (Gunby et al., 2012). Indeed, campaigns which only construct men as ‘non-violent ‘allies’ (Powell and Henry, 2014: 11) problematically reinforce the notion of the rapist as the ‘deviant’ other,

which enables men to ‘easily distance themselves from the problem and subsequently not assume any responsibility for violence against women’ (Rich et al., 2010: 217). Hence, it is important that men recognise and reflect upon their involvement in the perpetuation of a culture in which sexual violence against women is prevalent. As Murphy notes: ‘asking too little of men, or effusively responding to their token efforts, perpetuates male privilege... it places the burden on changing rape culture squarely on the shoulders of those most directly affected by it: women’ (2009: 127). Further, positioning women as victims, while failing to construct the perpetrator as male, perpetuates the responsabilisation of women (Pease, 2014). Interestingly, a significant proportion of young men argued that campaigns should focus primarily upon the victimisation of the woman. It was suggested that the poster show ‘some of the lasting effects that rape can have on women’ (FG5), as an image where the victim is in ‘some discomfort’ may effectively ‘trigger a sort of emotional response ... of compassion and concern’ (FG1).

### *Responsibilising Women: Victim Blaming and Female Risk Taking*

The campaign’s male-as-perpetrator focus was only supported by a minority of participants, on the basis that ‘it’s the men raping the women’ (FG6). Others, however, argued that the campaign was ‘quite sexist’ (FG2) and endeavoured to shift some of the responsibility onto the woman: ‘that shouldn’t just be like, you know, if you’ve been raped it’s totally his fault. I mean, there are other ... factors like consumption of alcohol’ (FG6). A few participants were also keen to highlight the likelihood of a false allegation: ‘you’re insinuating that all rapes happen because of men ... it could possibly happen because they’re misled by women and then claim rape’ (FG4). This use of victim-blaming and victim-sceptical discourses resonates with other research into prevention campaigns (Rich et al., 2010) and again can be seen to be

an aspect of 'identity work'. The young men attempt to reduce male responsibility for rape and protect their 'masculine self' through their constructions of the culpable and risky female.

The pervasiveness of these discourses further illustrates the difficulties faced in disrupting dominant scripts of sexuality, masculinity and femininity. Indeed, such discourses were particularly prevalent when the young men discussed the campaign's potential audience, with many contending that the intervention did and/or should aim to raise young women's awareness of sexual assault. Some of these comments were relatively anodyne in nature. For example, it was suggested that the campaign may help young women to conceptualise their experience as a crime (FG1) and may encourage reporting (FG5 and FG4). As the project only comprised young men, it is not possible to examine whether the campaign had such, if any, impact upon women. Nevertheless, it does indicate the potential for a positive, unintended consequence, given that many females do not classify their experiences as rape (Gunby et al., 2012).

However, a significant proportion of men conceptualised the campaign as providing a warning to young women. For some participants, the poster was considered to have a dual impact: 'I think it's perfect, like it shows the dangers that can happen when you drink, and it also lets guys know that you shouldn't be doing anything like that' (FG6). Moreover, a minority of men considered the intervention was primarily, if not solely, concerned with the behaviour of young women. It was suggested that the campaign informed young women that some individuals 'purposely go out and find someone who is in that state to try and take advantage of them' (FG6) and subsequently, 'women shouldn't get themselves in that position' (FG4). Concomitantly, women were expected to employ risk avoidance strategies:

If you're going to get drunk, make sure you've bought a friend with you to look after you, safety in numbers and all that malarkey. And then, just to be careful who you're with, what you're surrounded with as to what people you're with, and just like make sure you're alright and not gonna pass out in front of some other suspecting character (FG2).

One group suggested an unrealistic degree of vigilance: 'to watch out, even then they're in their own place, and don't fall asleep on the settee' (FG6).

That the poster was construed in this manner is disheartening, particularly as the explicit aim of the campaign was to shift the focus from the behaviour of women to that of young men. This disappointment was compounded by the use of victim blaming discourses, for example: 'she's in a position to be kind of contributory negligent' (FG5). Consequently, dominant discourses surrounding femininity, female risk taking and the responsibilisation of women clearly informed participants' reading of a perpetrator focused poster. More so, a significant proportion of participants argued that female-as-victim focused campaigns were a logical and essential approach to rape prevention and should also encompass factors beyond intoxication, specifically attire: 'there's um quite a loud argument going on that girls shouldn't have to cover up, they can wear what they want, it's never their fault. But I think a little bit of common sense literature and a bit of crime prevention, a bit of awareness for females' (FG2).

This construction of female-as-victim campaigns as 'common-sense' and as 'crime prevention' perpetuates victim-blaming scripts, which reduces the accountability of the perpetrator and responsibilises women. These perspectives suggest that young men continue to construct sexual assault as predominantly an issue for women. This, in turn, enables them to disregard any role they may play in the continuance of a culture in which sexual violence is not only prevalent, but frequently condoned and trivialised (Gavey, 2005). Moreover,

women have long been the recipients of such advice, are well aware of their vulnerability and adopt multiple ‘risk reducing’ strategies (Brooks, 2011; Sheard, 2011). While there was some recognition of this: ‘I think girls know what to do anyway’ (FG4), the majority of participants appeared to be unaware, which is quite a feat, given the ubiquity of such campaigns. This lack of knowledge may stem from rape not being considered an issue of personal concern, thus highlighting a central challenge in the development and implementation of effective interventions.

### **Conclusion: Lessons Learnt and Moving Forward**

The male focused Liverpool campaign represents a positive development in the field of sexual violence prevention in the UK, which has tended to focus on the behaviour of women. Female-centric campaigns perpetuate victim blaming attitudes and mistakenly presuppose that engaging in ‘risk averse’ conduct will prevent abuse. These processes of responsibilisation problematically misconstrue the reality of assault and fundamentally construct and reinforce the message that sexual violence is a female issue. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that the campaign was far from problem free. The intervention clearly adopts a threat based approach and could be criticised for assuming that the knowledge of the law and the fear of a criminal sanction, *per se*, will be sufficient to prevent abusive behaviour. Correspondingly, critics could argue that the campaign perpetuates stereotypical gender scripts, individualises the causes of sexual violence and does little to tackle the wider exo, meso and macro factors. This, in turn, eschews the state’s responsibility for developing effective mechanisms of prevention. The adoption of a time-constrained poster campaign and the lack of an interactive element is also far from ideal. In order to maximise impact and reinforce their message, media campaigns need to be continuous and complemented with

other techniques which would ideally involve participant interaction (Casey and Lyndhorst, 2009; DeGue et al., 2014).

Nevertheless, various financial and political factors impact upon the development and implementation of interventions. Campaigns are performative in nature: they send a message to the public as to how the stakeholder conceives of the underlying problem and the perceived solution. Campaigns are fundamentally politicised, as stakeholders are likely to be acutely attentive to the public relations element of an intervention. Here, we once again highlight the importance of Bacchi's considerations regarding the power dynamics that pervade the construction of problems and policy responses (1999). Accordingly, the political (and financial) setting is likely to necessitate certain compromises, however, '[w]hile we have to make political compromises to achieve practical outcomes, we must continue to be reflexive about the political implications of the reforms and practices we advocate' (Pease, 2014: 36).

This in turn leads to a consideration of the gendered nature of the intervention. While it could be argued that a campaign should be less confrontational, we need to consider the representation of the underlying social problem (Bacchi, 1999). It is important to avoid constructing sexual violence as a female issue, or as involving only a few deviant men. Our data, in conjunction with the wider literature, suggests that young men should be encouraged to engage in a critical reflection upon the relationship between gender, specifically masculinity, and sexual violence (Flood, 2008; Pease, 2014; Quadara, 2014). As we have seen, young men's perspectives drew on various stereotypes and misconceptions relating to sex, consent and rape and participants engaged in processes of 'identity work' whereby they strove to protect their good masculine self from that of the menacing rapist. Indeed, the

research illustrates the pervasive and enduring nature of dominant discourses pertaining to sexuality, masculinity and femininity. Nevertheless, contestations and disruptions frequently emerged and stereotypical perspectives did not go unchallenged.

Without wanting to be unduly prescriptive, as it is recognised that interventions should be appropriately contextualised, we recommend that future campaigns capitalise upon such moments of contestation and disruption. These moments provide an opportunity for the construction and promotion of more ethical views on sex and consent, and for participants to reflect upon and explore scripts of masculinity/ies (and femininity/ies) and sexual violence. While the focus groups were not part of the campaign, the discussions that developed, along with the homosocial nature of masculinity and male sexuality (Flood, 2008), support the contention that peer group interactive sessions should be a vital element of any intervention, as they provided the space for discourses to emerge, be contested and ultimately transformed. If possible, universities should establish a rolling programme of workshops, commencing during freshers' week and running throughout the academic year. Young men would work collaboratively with a peer facilitator to explore issues and perspectives regarding sex, consent and gender relations. In turn, participants would be offered the opportunity to facilitate future groups, in an attempt to engender ownership. Ideally, young men would be involved at all stages: from conception, through to implementation and assessment of the intervention.

The overall aim would be to invoke shifts at the individual, exo and meso levels to promote gender equity (Jewkes et al., 2015). At the same time, it is recognised that disrupting and challenging masculinity, particularly hegemonic masculinity, is an exceptionally difficult process. As the analysis has shown, dominant gender scripts are pervasive and resilient; as

Butler notes, 'those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished' (1988: 522). Hence, it is important to be realistic. A single intervention, however well-conceived, cannot be expected to institute fundamental long term attitudinal, behavioural and cultural change. Nor it is possible for one campaign to encompass the diversity of factors that exist in relation to violence against women. It is, however, important to contest discourses relating to female drunkenness and sexual violence and shift the focus from victim prevention to perpetration prevention.

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<sup>2</sup> For a review of 140 perpetrator primary prevention interventions see DeGue et al., (2014).

<sup>3</sup> See for example the 'Good Lad' Initiative: <http://www.goodladworkshop.com/>.

<sup>4</sup> While the campaign focused upon the specific issue of heterosexual sexual violence, it is recognised that sexual violence also occurs in same-sex relationships.

<sup>5</sup> The other two prerequisites are: whether s/he will be able to be influenced by the law or 'bring such understanding to bear on his conduct choices at the moment of making his choices? and will the costs of non-compliance outside the perceived benefits' (Robinson and Darley, 2004: 175).